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Letters to the Editor

Letter Flap

I read with interest and concern your page-one article (Dec. 15) on KGB "disinformation." It included the assertion that my magazine ran a story in November 1982 based on a KGB forgery. I assume your reporter was briefed by the State Department. He made no attempt that I know of to check his story with us.

Our story had been based on what appeared to be a letter to Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick from a South African embassy official, Pieter Swanepoel. It indicated ties between Ambassador Kirkpatrick and South African government officials, particularly General van der Westhuisen. Of course, we considered carefully the possibility that the letter was a forgery, for in this wicked world all and sundry engage in "positive disinformation."

Our decision to publish the letter was based on several considerations. These included the fact that it had come to us via a State Department source who had previously proved reliable and the fact that Mrs. Kirkpatrick had indeed had a secret meeting with General van der Westhuisen in March 1981, which initially she refused to admit. We also subjected the letter to analysis by experts on documents and typewriters. This supported our conclusion that the letter had indeed been typed in the South African embassy in Washington.

This, combined with the other considerations, led us to the decision that the story should be run together with Ambassador Kirkpatrick's response. Since then the only reaction has been the assertion, without any supporting evidence, that the document was a KGB forgery.

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